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Abstract

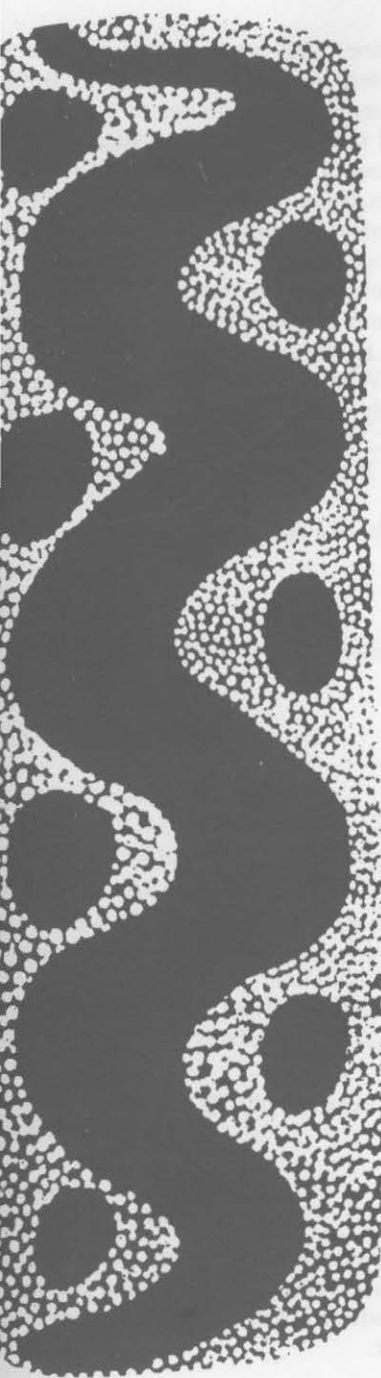
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SPECIAL ISSUE
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DAVID DARYDEEN

THE WINDRUSH COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE
WEST INDIANS IN BRITAIN

1948-1998



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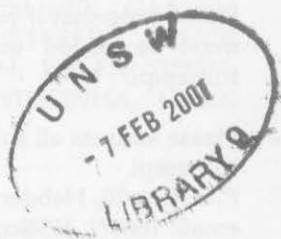
KUNAPIPI

Journal of Post-Colonial Writing

'I like grey, I'm here to stay'

John Agard

Dedication:
To the memory of
Paul Edwards &
Aubrey Williams



VOLUME XX NUMBER 1
1998

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Kunapipi is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Articles in this journal are refereed. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet. Wherever possible the submission should be on disc (soft-ware preferably Word for Windows, Wordperfect or Macwrite saved for PC on PC formatted disc) and should be accompanied by a hard copy, please include a short biography, address and email contact if available.

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Front cover: Aubrey Williams, 'Harpy Eagle', 1979. With kind permission of Eve and Maridowa Williams

Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal Myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.

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INTRODUCTION

In June 1948 the *S.S. Empire Windrush* docked at Tilbury and 492 Jamaicans disembarked. Between that date and the 1970s, when primary immigration from the Caribbean was effectively terminated, several thousand West Indians came to live in Britain. The Empire was 'coming home', claiming rights of abode as British citizens holding British passports. Today there are half-a-million people of West Indian origin or descent living in Britain.

The Jamaican immigrants who came on the *S.S. Empire Windrush* were obeying traditions. West Indians, historically, have only travelled in order to work. Between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, they had been shipped from Africa and India to the West Indies to work in the plantations. In the period up to the Second World War, they were recruited to build the Panama Canal and to work in the factories of the United States of America. After the Second World War there was great demand for labour in Britain as the nation began to rebuild her broken cities. West Indians were actively recruited to work, through advertisements placed in West Indian journals by London Transport, the British Hotels and Restaurant Association, and similar organizations. They came to work in factories, buses, trains, hotels and hospitals, in jobs traditionally of low status and low pay. And they came with a sense of cultural identification with the Motherland. They saw themselves as British. Their education after all was based on the British system: the books they read (from the *Royal Reader* to Enid Blyton and William Wordsworth) were books being taught in schools in Britain. Their language was English or English-based; many of their religions (Church of England, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.) were derived from Britain and passed on to them by British missionary movements. And the very towns, villages and counties they lived in were named after British places and personalities – for instance, Georgetown, Albion Estate or Brighton village (in British Guiana); Cornwall, Middlesex, Surrey (counties in Jamaica); Barbados, with its Nelson's Column at the heart of its capital (predating the one in London's Trafalgar Square) was commonly known as 'Little England'. The journey to Britain however was a journey to an illusion, for the West Indian immigrants faced the reality of rejection by the Motherland. They may have believed passionately in their closeness and affinity to Britain and possessed a sense of belonging, but the British were equally convinced of their alienness, their otherness.

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A handful of immigrants had literary ambitions, but they too had to undergo rites of passage on the English factory floor. Both Sam Selvon and George Lamming spent time as common labourers whilst their first novels were being considered for publication. Wilson Harris, between Faber's acceptance of his *Palace of the Peacock* and the appearance of the novel, found employment as a factory hand. (V.S. Naipaul was one of the few writers fortunate enough to be exempted from cheap, casual labour. His Trinidad and Tobago Government scholarship took him by plane to England and Oxford).